

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

The Watts Backlash

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LOS ANGELES—At the point on Aug. 12 when the Watts rioting was turning into insurrection, an attempt to calm down frenzied Negroes was offered by John Buggs, chairman, of the County Human Relations Council.

Buggs is a respected official of Los Angeles County. But he also happens to be a Negro. Thus, his offer was turned down flat by Deputy Police Chief Roger Murdock. "We consider you part of the problem," Murdock told Buggs evenly.

The incident by no means puts the blame on the Los Angeles police for the racial crisis here. What Murdock's position fairly symbolizes is the hardening of the white community's attitude toward Negroes generally as a result of the Watts riots. Far from awakening whites to the deepening Negro problems, the riots produced a classic white backlash.

This Watts backlash creates a vicious circle. Anti-Negro emotions stirred by the riots make it difficult politically to take steps easing tensions in Negro ghettos here. This inadequate response, so obvious to the Negroes, may trigger further Negro violence. And the violence almost certainly would intensify the backlash.

WHAT MAKES this vicious circle so dangerous is



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that the white backlash is not limited to the lunatic fringe. After Watts, the rich, liberal Jewish communities in Beverly Hills and Bel Air were thrown into such unreasoning panic that scores of families laid off Negro servants.

One example points up this reaction. Before Watts, the Democratic National Committee was planning to raise money for Negro registration by charging \$1000 a ticket for a Los Angeles luncheon with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the drawing card. After Watts, the plan was dropped. The reason: The Jewish businessmen who were counted on to attend the lunch now would not pay \$1000—or even \$1—to hear Dr. King.

While both Republicans and Democrats last spring quietly searched for a Negro for their State tickets in 1966, they now would not

dare nominate anything but a lily-white ticket.

Indeed, if that election were held today, it would be deeply affected by the backlash.

By taking an insensitive, hard-nosed attitude toward the Negroes (refusing even to visit Watts), Mayor Sam Yorty has a new popularity among whites of not only Los Angeles County but but also Orange and San Diego Counties to the south. Because these three counties comprise 65 per cent of the State's voters, Yorty is seriously considering seeking the Democratic nomination for Governor against two-term Gov. Edmund G. Brown.

AND BECAUSE actor Ronald Reagan (the leading Republican contender for Governor) also rides the white backlash, Brown must watch his step. He cannot push too hard for a pro-Negro program.

The Los Angeles police provide a case in point. True enough, Negro charges of "police brutality" are grossly overblown. "Police discourtesy" might be a more accurate description. Yet, tension would be reduced measurably if more

Negroes were added to the force, if an intensive course in human relations were taught at the Police Academy, and — ultimately — if hard-boiled Police Chief William Parker were retired with honor.

But Parker has become a folk hero to southern California whites. And though an outstanding police administrator, Parker is inflexible when it comes to reforms. Consequently, a politician who tries to move Parker or his police does so at great political risk.

In short, the overwhelming white reaction to Watts has been anger and inactivity. What passes for a white establishment in sprawling Los Angeles has not responded to crisis. Neither emergency nor long-term solutions are in prospect.

ONE MEMBER of the establishment who does understand the crisis is John McCone, a conservative Republican who once headed the AEC and CIA in Washington and was named by Gov. Brown to investigate the riots. In private conversation with well-heeled friends, McCone pleads for a sympathetic interest in Watts. To avoid another holocaust, he knows there must be at least 5000 temporary jobs for unemployed Negroes.

If McCone fails, renewed violence becomes all but certain—accelerating the vicious circle of racial conflict.

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